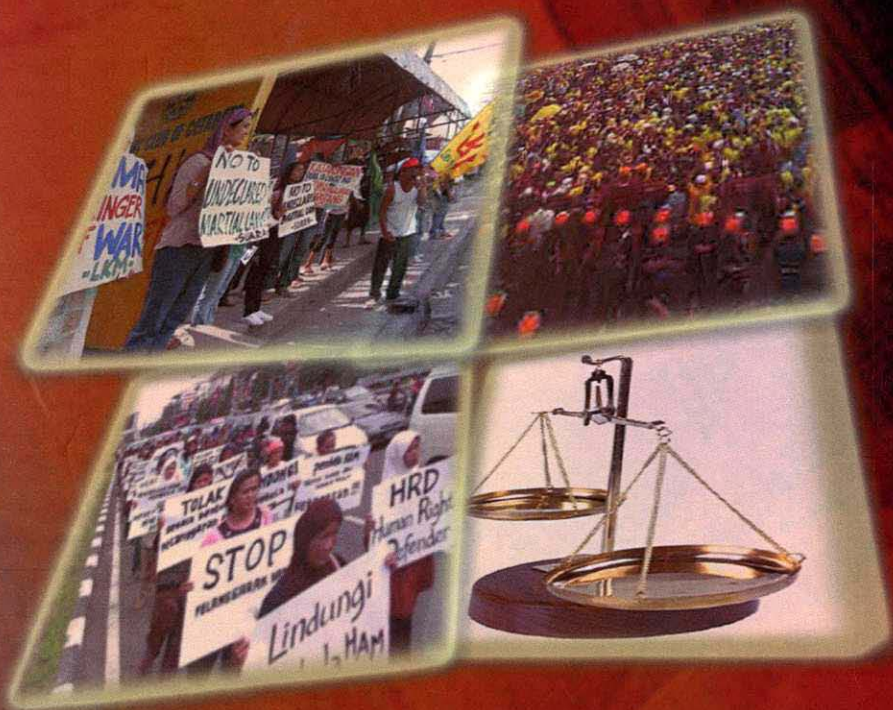


CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN MALAYSIA

Selected Issues



KHAIRIL AZMIN MOKHTAR

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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Malaysian Constitution, Political Party and Party System

Wahabuddin Ra'ees

Introduction

The Federation of Malaysia is a politically pluralistic state with a dominant-party system since its independence in 1957. It practices a parliamentary style of democracy. Malaysia's constitution guarantees fundamental human rights including right of peaceful assembly and associations. Ethnic-based political parties have emerged in Malaysia as early as 1940s. Since its independence, Barisan Nasional or National Front (BN) coalition, despite occasional setbacks, has won all elections and ruled the country. Its power base was put to test again in March 2008 elections when it lost its two-thirds majority mandate, raising the possibility of Malaysia moving away from dominant-party system to a two-party system. This chapter examines the relationship between constitution, party politics and the possibility of two-party system in Malaysia. This study concludes that a change from a dominant party system to two-party system does not mean a change of power from BN to opposition if the ruling coalition commits itself to good and effective governance.

Political Party and Party System

Political parties are defined as groups of persons organized to acquire political power and maintain or stay in power usually by participating in electoral campaigns. Edmund Burke, in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontent*, defined political party as "an organized assembly of men, united for working together for the national interest, according to the particular principle they agreed upon."¹